

Contextualizing resilience within a mutable network organization

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explored how resilience is conceptualized and operationalized in different contexts within the Team Finland network organization. It clarified how organizational and regional resilience are conceptualized as emergent and combined phenomena shaped by global crises.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative grounded theory approach was employed to analyze 23 thematic interviews with key actors in the Team Finland network. The iterative coding process identified seven key themes and developed the core category of the mutable network organization, reflecting the emergence of resilience as a socially constructed phenomenon in which both organizations and regions undergo substantial transformations.

Findings – A mutable network organization embodies how organizations navigate a landscape of diverse expertise with conflicting goals. There is an increasing need to respond flexibly to crises such as Brexit, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine. This study highlighted the tensions between bureaucracy and real-time information, global challenges and local adaptation, and short-term agility and long-term sustainability. Resilience emerged as an adaptive capacity and dynamic, transformative force. The use of policy jargon such as the “common operational picture” was associated with masking structural challenges while framing uncontrollable changes as manageable.

Research limitations/implications – This study focused on a Finnish government-led network operating globally to support internationalization. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings to other network organizations in different regimes or cultural settings may be limited.

Originality/value – This study introduced a novel framework for understanding resilience in network organizations, as defined by the interviewees working in expert positions. It offered insights into how collaboration and multiscale governance can influence organizational and regional resilience. By addressing the mutable and evolutionary nature of networks, these findings contribute to resilience and governance studies.

Keywords Network organization, Resilience, Grounded theory, Mutations, Governance, Evolution

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1. Introduction

In today’s interconnected world, the resilience of organizations and networks has become critical for navigating complex crises such as geopolitical conflicts, pandemics, and economic disruptions. As a concept, resilience is widely recognized but remains multifaceted and, at times, contentious in its scientific applicability. Originating from disciplines such as ecology, resilience broadly refers to the ability of systems — materials, organizations, individuals, or cities — to recover from disruptions or adapt to change (Chen *et al.*, 2021; Holling, 1973; Pendall *et al.*, 2010). Over time, resilience has evolved from a technical framework to a holistic approach encompassing organizational and regional dynamics (Henig and Knight, 2023; Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007). It is a powerful metaphor in the social sciences; however, it is challenging to define resilience unambiguously.

While resilience has become a cornerstone of public- and private-sector strategies, critics argue that its overuse risks diluting its theoretical and practical value (Pendall *et al.*, 2010). This study critically examined resilience as a socially constructed phenomenon within network organizations and analyzed how it is invoked in the language-games of policy

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practices and operationalized during crises. Wittgenstein's (1953/2009) concept of "language-games" (sprachspiel) suggests that the meaning of words and sentences is determined by how they are used in specific contexts or activities. This emphasizes that language is not a rigid system but a dynamic tool shaped by human interactions and social situations. The analysis of resilience as a social phenomenon focused on instances in which resilience was mentioned and the vocabulary surrounding the term. This was particularly the case when interviewees recalled instances in which the network's partners were compelled to adapt to rapidly changing geopolitical circumstances.

Three distinct categories of resilience have been identified. Absorptive resilience is defined as the capacity to swiftly revert to the original state, exhibiting minimal impact. Adaptive resilience is defined as the capacity of a system to withstand shocks and continue functioning during its transition to a new state. Transformative resilience is defined as an organization's capacity to interact with disturbances and transition toward new realities (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2022).

In this study, the core category grounded in the research data was labeled mutable network organization (MNO). It reflects the unpredictable and significant changes that organizations must navigate during major crises. These changes can be partially uncontrollable, self-propelling, or mutative. Risks are also mutable in nature because, according to Latour (1987), a gap exists between the states of affairs and their depiction. For example, maps, governance, laws, and narratives are "immutable mobiles" and contain and handle matters beyond them, which can be assumed to change quickly and unpredictably (Wong, 2015). However, the network organization structure simultaneously resists and absorbs changes while working toward the evolution of the entire network and its individual partner organizations, contributing to a transition to a new level of operation.

The MNO incorporates adaptive mechanisms, including learning and adjusting the responses. However, a more comprehensive understanding of the MNO suggests that it is best conceptualized as a form of transformative resilience. The distinguishing characteristic of an MNO is its capacity to modify its organizational structure, collaborative arrangements, and strategic initiatives in response to global disruption. This signifies a profound transformation, encompassing the way resilience is operationalized and the organizational functionality itself.

Accordingly, the MNO progresses beyond conventional notions of adaptation, aligning instead with the concept of resilience as a dynamic and identity-shaping process (Holling, 1973; Martin and Sunley, 2020). Furthermore, Satyal *et al.* (2017) demonstrated that transformative resilience serves as a catalyst for regional evolution. In accordance with the findings of our research, Team Finland, in its capacity as an MNO, has demonstrated an aptitude for discerning the requirements and opportunities presented by diverse geographical regions within a contemporary poly-crisis era. This phenomenon can be partially attributed to the presence of actors that transcend the various territorial levels of the network, encompassing national and international domains (Keinänen *et al.*, 2025).

Recent research has highlighted the scope of resilience beyond organizations to the regions in which they operate, emphasizing the interplay between organizational structures and broader geographic contexts (Martin and Sunley, 2020; Trippel *et al.*, 2023). Resilience is viewed through dual perspectives: how network organizations adapt to or are transformed by external pressures and how various regional contexts influence these adaptations. The principal idea is to explore the dynamics of organizational flexibility and unpredictable network mutations in response to rapidly changing global conditions. Rather than measuring precise changes in member organizations and across regions, we aimed to interpret the definitions of resilience produced through the network organization's language-games, which further operationalize the organization's strategic choices. Notably, the concepts proposed by the interviewees in this study served as the foundation for developing a data-driven theory.

Team Finland served as a compelling case study. This collaborative, government-led network supports the internationalization of Finnish businesses and builds resilience across geographic and administrative scales. Through shared expertise and resources, the network

fosters flexibility and adaptation in response to global challenges such as geopolitical shifts and economic instability (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011; Team Finland, 2019).

This study used a qualitative grounded theory (GT) approach, a method well suited to examining resilience as an emergent and socially constructed phenomenon. The central idea of GT is to build a theory based on data; therefore, the analysis of interview data and its theoretical framework must adhere sufficiently to the concepts mentioned by the interviewees. Data were collected through 23 expert interviews within the Team Finland network, allowing for iterative analysis and theory development. Grounded theory provides a framework to uncover how resilience is conceptualized, applied, and operationalized at organizational and regional scales (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011; Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007).

The primary aim was to investigate how the concept of resilience is defined and applied within a network organization. Resilience emerges through contextual, practical, and regional variations. Specifically, it is shaped by and observed through knowledge sharing, role negotiation, and multiscalar collaboration, reflecting the perspectives and experiences of network actors.

This study addressed the following research questions:

- (1) How are organizational and regional resilience conceptualized within the Team Finland network as emergent phenomena shaped by global crises?
- (2) What theoretical conclusions can be drawn from the interviewees' understanding and operationalization of resilience?

By adopting a qualitative GT approach, we aimed to provide new insights into the organizational dimensions of resilience, complementing the largely quantitative research landscape in resilience studies (Sutton *et al.*, 2023). Our research focused on a single national network within the Finnish context; therefore, the generalizability of the findings to other network organizations in different regimes or cultural settings may be somewhat constrained. Moreover, this study prioritized the perspectives of high-level actors within the network, overlooking insights from other key stakeholders, such as frontline staff or external partners, whose additional perspectives could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of resilience at various operational levels.

2. Research design

2.1 Methodology: grounded theory approach

Introduced by Glaser and Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), GT is a qualitative research methodology designed to generate theories from systematically gathered and analyzed data. The core feature of GT is its emergent design, allowing the researcher to construct a theory grounded in data, rather than imposing a predefined theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This approach makes GT particularly useful for exploring complex and underexplored phenomena such as the socially constructed nature of resilience.

We employed GT to capture how resilience is understood, defined, and operationalized within the Team Finland network. The GT approach involves several key coding stages, including open coding, axial (or intermediate) coding, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). In open coding, the researcher reads the data line-by-line, identifies concepts, and categorizes them based on emerging themes. In this phase, we identified 43 resilience-related concepts, which were later grouped into seven categories. The axial coding phase, which occurs in parallel with open coding, involves reorganizing and refining these categories by exploring their relationships and hierarchies (Birks and Mills, 2015; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

This phase resulted in the identification of three key dimensions or “axes,” with the main categories at their ends illustrating the ambiguity of resilience as a concept and the obvious tensions and contradictions associated with it. Although coding in GT has traditionally been

presented as a linear process, we adopted a more iterative approach. Consistent with the constructivist branch of GT (Charmaz, 2014), the coding stages overlapped as we continually refined our understanding of the data through an ongoing dialogue between the data and aggregating categories, leaning toward a more theoretical understanding of resilience as a social phenomenon. This iterative process allowed us to continuously return to the data and refine emerging concepts and categories to ensure that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' perspectives. Our analysis was shaped by the researcher's active role in interpreting how resilience is represented as part of the network partners' conceptions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

This study provides a thorough exploration of resilience within the Team Finland network; however, the study has some limitations. While the GT approach allows for an in-depth exploration of resilience, it is inherently interpretive, and the findings reflect the specific sociopolitical and economic conditions in which the research was conducted. Future research should expand these findings by incorporating other contexts and perspectives to provide a more holistic understanding of resilience in network organizations. Despite these limitations, this study offers important insights into the resilience of network organizations, particularly in the context of global crises. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how public-private networks can bolster their crisis response capabilities, offering a solid foundation for future research and practical applications in network governance and crisis management.

2.2 Data collection: thematic interviews

The data comprised 23 thematic interviews conducted with experts from the government-led Team Finland network established in 2013. Team Finland (2019, 2024) rests on a public-private partnership focused on promoting Finnish internationalization, trade, and investment. It operates on multiple geographic and administrative scales, comprising central actors such as the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment; the Ministry for Foreign Affairs; Business Finland; Finnvera; and the Centers for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment, and other actors' agencies and embassies outside Finland. The interviewees were selected based on their roles and expertise in international trade, regional development, and network governance. Most participants held senior-, expert-, or executive-level roles and had extensive professional experience in public administration and international trade, often spanning decades. Many had been involved in the Team Finland network since its formation. The interviewees offered diverse perspectives on resilience in national and international contexts. The interviews lasted between 45 and 65 min, and all but one were conducted virtually via Teams. The interviews covered three themes: governance, disruptions, and regional development. This thematic focus allowed us to explore how Team Finland actors experienced and responded to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the war in Ukraine within their respective domains. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using the NVivo software, which facilitated the organization of the data into relevant categories and concepts. To ensure the credibility and depth of the analysis, coding was cross-checked by researchers at different stages of the study (Corbin and Strauss, 2014), allowing for the triangulation of perspectives and minimizing potential biases. One of the authors who had prior professional experience in Team Finland participated in this research, which provided valuable insights into the network's operations; however, careful reflection was required to mitigate potential biases during data analysis.

2.3 Data analysis: open and axial coding

Consistent with the principles of GT, data analysis began with *open coding*. During the initial phase, interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times, and individual phrases, sentences, or paragraphs containing relevant data related to resilience were coded (Strauss and Corbin,

1990). This stage of analysis aimed to identify recurring themes and concepts connected to resilience, enabling a broad exploratory approach to the data.

The open coding phase yielded 43 key concepts related to resilience, which were subsequently organized into seven combined categories. In the conceptual framework, these categories reflected the primary ways in which resilience was understood and operationalized by Team Finland actors in various crisis contexts. After reviewing the combined categories, we consolidated interrelated ideas and identified the overarching patterns shaping resilience within the network, which allowed us to form tentative theoretical models anchored in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Consequently, we developed a three-axis framework that captured the semantic and structural dimensions, demonstrating how resilience was conceptualized within the Team Finland network as part of authorities' language-games (Figure 1).

By abstracting the combined categories into the three axes of information, scale, and strategy, we constructed a framework that comprehensively represented the multiscale and multidimensional nature of resilience in a network organization. For example, the interactions and tensions between various combined categories revealed how decision-making processes are shaped by structural and contextual factors, including a balance between global frameworks and specific local needs. The collaborative nature of the network highlights the reliance on partnerships and trust to support an effective crisis response and resilience building.

To enhance the transparency of the coding process, Table 1 summarizes how the open coding categories connect to the axial dimensions, highlighting the central tensions identified in the data and representative concepts. This mapping illustrates the analytical path from the initial codes to the formation of the three key resilience axes.

3. Findings: axial coding and the dimensions of resilience

This section presents the core empirical findings derived through axial coding. Grounded in the data, three key analytical dimensions emerged: information, scale, and strategy. These axes structured how resilience is conceptualized and enacted within the Team Finland network,

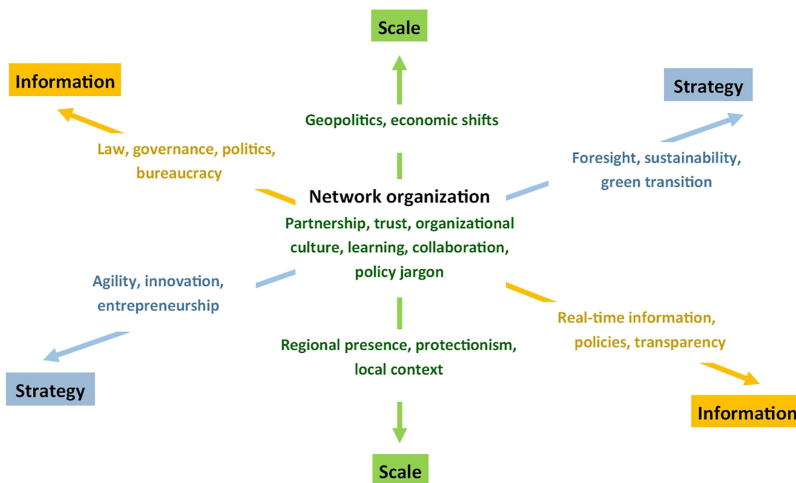


Figure 1. Key concepts and combined categories on the axes of knowledge, scale, and strategy. This visual representation of axes is used to elucidate the tensions and contradictions that emerge from the data. Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 1. Summary of analytical axes, tensions, categories, and example concepts

Axes	Tensions	Open coding categories	Key concepts (empirical examples)
Information	Bureaucracy ↔ Real-time information	Bureaucracy, information	Law, regulations, control ↔ Timeliness, transparency, weak signals
Scale	Local context ↔ Global shifts	Geography, deglobalization	Regional presence, history ↔ Geopolitics, multilateralism
Strategy	Agility, innovation ↔ Foresight, sustainability	Capabilities, resilience	Entrepreneurship, agility ↔ Green transition, foresight
Network organization (mediator)	Flexibility ↔ Structural constraints	Collaboration and governance	Trust, learning, partnerships, organizational culture

Source(s): Authors' own work

capturing distinct tensions and patterns across governance levels and crisis types, such as geopolitical disruptions, global pandemics, and economic shocks.

A closer reflection of these dimensions highlights that they not only organize the empirical material but also expose ambiguities in how resilience is discussed and operationalized. Notably, concepts like “resilience,” “sustainability,” and “agility,” although widely invoked in policy and strategy contexts, may function more as rhetorical devices than as concrete practices (Pendall *et al.*, 2010). The following sections examine how each axis unfolds in practice, including whether the key terms reflect genuine capacities or remain largely aspirational.

3.1 Information axis: bureaucracy versus real-time information

The information axis explores the tension between *political, legal, and bureaucratic structures* and the need for *real-time, actionable information*. Bureaucratic systems, characterized by laws, policies, and administrative frameworks, provide the stability essential for crisis management. However, this predictability can create rigidity, slow down decision-making processes, and reduce the necessary flexibility in rapidly changing circumstances. Stark (2014) described this paradox as a “straitjacket” of crisis management, highlighting how rigid structures often conflict with the need for adaptive responses in volatile environments.

About the limits of government organization, an interviewee noted the following:

Tasks are defined by the law. (R7)

There were elements of slowness and bureaucracy. (R20)

Another participant highlighted administrative stickiness amplifying the tension, stating:

We are held back or drawn to a former direction, partly due to our structures. This begins with the fact that we are a ministry-led system, and legislation defines our tasks. For example, [...] have no general mandate; everything we do is either defined by law or delegated to us by the ministry. These legal frameworks shape our service offerings and limit flexibility. (R23)

This underscores how existing frameworks can anchor organizations to previous operational modes, potentially hindering the agility needed to respond to new challenges.

Conversely, the demand for real-time information is crucial for resilience. The ability to gather, process, and share real-time data allows organizations to anticipate and react to emerging challenges. Interviewees emphasized transparent, up-to-date information flows as valuable for decision-making and partnership building:

Information about the region's markets and situations is produced openly and in real time, but it's realistic. (R16)

Information sharing supports collaboration within the network, as one interviewee explained:

Collaboration among the actors and the well-functioning, close-knit channels in a crisis offer clear benefits. (R20)

Despite this emphasis on information sharing, bureaucratic barriers suggest that the ideal of real-time data may not always be achieved. Another participant stated the following:

The network has immense opportunities, but they are not fully recognized. (R2)

This gap between what was possible and reality highlights the risk of real-time information becoming more of a buzzword than an actionable practice, especially in the form of concepts such as a "common operational picture" or "situational awareness" when overused in daily practice.

In summary, the information axis illustrated how the tension between the hard administrative edges (law, governance, and politics) and real-time data is a key source of parlance related to the usage of information and its reliability. While the network ostensibly values transparency and collaboration, structural barriers hinder the full potential of real-time information to support decision-making. Addressing these barriers is critical to transform these ideals into effective resilience strategies.

3.2 Scale axis: global challenges versus local adaptation

Deglobalization emerged as a recurring theme in the interviews, with participants reflecting on protectionism, fractured global trade, and geopolitical instability reshaping Team Finland's operating environment. This was particularly evident in discussions of the escalating war in Ukraine and its impact on international trade.

The rules-based world trade system, in which Finnish companies have been able to trust that regulations and rules are in place, has been torn apart. Geopolitics is currently ruling. (R9)

The interviewed experts noted growing barriers to international commerce, driven by protectionist policies and the weakening of multilateral trade systems. [Gaens and Sinkkonen \(2023\)](#) discussed this shift as part of a broader systemic transition from a unipolar to multipolar world order, in which the United States, China, and Russia are key actors. The interviews revealed that these shifts required Finnish companies to adapt to the new geopolitical realities.

By contrast, *place-based adaptation* relies on leveraging local knowledge and conditions to build resilience. Several interviewees stressed the importance of understanding and responding to the unique characteristics of each region where Team Finland operates. A regional presence and localized social capital were essential for maintaining a local perspective, access to local knowledge, and adaptability.

Is resilience about strengthening our presence globally, even in challenging places, and building our partnerships there? (R21)

Despite recognizing the importance of tailoring strategies to local contexts, the participants noted inconsistencies in the implementation of these strategies. One interviewee stated:

The ongoing challenge is to increase internationality, especially in this type of small business-dominated region, where the question of how to grow exports and maintain competitiveness arises. (R14)

Another participant remarked:

We identify local phenomena, but whether they are genuinely different from those in other regions may remain unclear. (R2)

These insights suggest that while “place-based adaptation” is valued in most comments related to geopolitics, its application may be weakened by standardized approaches, which potentially reduce its effectiveness, and by masking fundamentally place-neutral approaches as context-sensitive and place-based approaches (Barca *et al.*, 2012).

In summary, the scale axis revealed a clash between the global and local dimensions of resilience. Team Finland’s ability to balance global challenges with local needs is inconsistent, and localized strategies are not always fully integrated into broader network operations. Interviewees’ opinions that emphasized local uniqueness were also challenged by interregionalism. To address global–local interdependencies, deeper context-specific information combined with a better understanding of administrative and operational synergies in the geographies of multiscale activities are needed.

3.3 Strategy axis: short-term capacity versus long-term sustainability

The interviewees were eager to discuss previous transformational situations that tested their resilience, emphasizing that various crises are increasingly seen as a normal part of the evolving global landscape. One participant reflected:

During an extended lockdown abroad, our capacity was really put to the test. Organizational capacity can withstand extreme situations. However, in a small unit like ours, the heavy pressure inevitably fell on us. (R4)

This illustrates how resilience often relies on personal endurance within constrained organizational settings. It also reflects the tension between system-level continuity and individual-level strains that emerged in several interviews. Additionally, the interviewees highlighted the importance of sustainability as a guiding principle for long-term planning when setting goals for the future, particularly in the context of environmental challenges and green transitions:

The green transition is something tangible and really important. (R9)

Another interviewee suggested that one way to cope with contrasting demands was organizational ambidexterity (O’Reilly and Tushman, 2013), where conflicting objectives can be turned into new practices that strengthen organizations, especially in multi-participant network organizations, where shared expertise is a possible and wished-for practice:

As an organization, we are constantly looking for the ability to respond to both major trends and acute crises. (R11)

Similarly, “agility” was frequently mentioned as a key factor in how the Finnish government and companies have adapted to sudden shifts in global markets. However, in some instances, it was unclear whether the term referred to concrete practices or was used as a catchphrase for an ideal that was not fully realized in practice. The ambiguity surrounding the term “agility” must be considered. Was the term intended to instill unwarranted optimism in the face of overwhelming challenges? What was the role of the network organization in pursuing agility? One participant reflected on agility in practice:

How can you survive when a factory is closed or there are issues with orders? The Finnish companies had creative solutions for this. (R19)

While resilience and sustainability were central to these organizational strategies, there is a risk of these terms becoming abstract ideals rather than practical tools for securing long-term sustainability and agility. These pressures triggered strategic reflection and complete organizational transformation.

In some cases, organizational responses to geopolitical disruptions transcended short-term adaptation and led to fundamental shifts in the mission and operations. One such example is the Finnish–Russian Chamber of Commerce.

The Finnish–Russian Chamber of Commerce rapidly transformed into EastCham following the onset of Russia’s war of aggression. Once the sanctions regime was announced, the organization began interpreting the implications for businesses and explaining what the sanctions meant for Finnish companies. It also shifted to producing market reports focused on South Caucasus and Central Asia. (R21)

Such a response illustrates how actors restructured their organizational identity and functions in reaction to geopolitical disruption. These shifts transcended short-term adaptation and reflected deeper changes in roles, strategies, and directions.

In summary, the strategy axis emphasized the need for Team Finland and its clients in new markets to integrate short-term agility with long-term sustainability by utilizing the whole capacity of different experts in the network organization and considering ambidexterity as a possible way to make organizations more resilient.

3.4 Role of the network organization in building resilience

The axial coding analysis indicated that, while the Team Finland network organization had significant potential for building resilience, particularly through collaboration and the integration of diverse actors, some structural challenges impeded this potential.

This also signifies that the efficacy and purpose of a network organization are contingent on its capacity to adapt to variable circumstances. Incorporating or excluding new actors may depend on how external and internal forces transform the network. In this regard, an amoeba-like network organization can adapt or even mutate in response to the challenges posed by the surrounding geopolitical situation and local circumstances, which may present contradictory demands from an organizational perspective.

Forums shared by the network partners play a pivotal role in facilitating the use of a common language and key terms. When linguistic practices are interpreted through a post-structuralist lens, shared concepts and their precise operational usage can be observed as expert parlance that shapes the everyday reality of the network organization’s partners, thereby influencing the values and practices of the entire network organization (Fairclough, 1992). Learning a language and understanding its specific meanings require the use of language within a specific community. The integration of language into activities and actions is also a salient issue. Concurrently, analogies that obscure meanings must be identified. The term “resilience” is inherently ambiguous, with its connotations varying across the contexts in which it is employed (Wittgenstein, 1953/2009). We found that the language-games shared by the expert community have a dual impact. They serve to strengthen competence-based identity. However, policy jargon can give rise to ambiguity, which may result in a lack of purposeful action or the inability to read weak signals. Nevertheless, a common language is the starting point for a hybrid risk management model, which requires extensive cooperation, co-planning, and co-regulation (Wong, 2015).

The relationships between language, things, and actions are not straightforward. The tension between bureaucracy and real-time information sharing, the complexity of balancing global and local needs, and the struggle to integrate short-term agility with long-term sustainability are key factors that define resilience in the social context, attaching the authorities’ policy terminology to the network organization’s capacity for resilience.

4. Selective coding: identifying the core category

This section presents the final stage of the GT analysis: selective coding. Building on the previous phases, this stage integrated the concepts and dimensions identified during open and axial coding into a unifying theoretical construct. This process led us to identify the *MNO* as the core category, encapsulating the key themes of flexibility, adaptability, and the capacity to adjust structure and strategy in response to dynamic and unpredictable conditions.

Selective coding is also referred to as theoretical or advanced coding in GT (Birks and Mills, 2011, 2022; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1978). Strauss and Corbin (1990) described it as the process of systematically relating categories to a core category, which organizes and synthesizes earlier findings. According to Charmaz, this stage not only consolidates data but also helps elevate the analysis to a theory-building level. Similarly, Morse and Clark (2019) emphasized that the core category should link the study's key themes, while Glaser (1978) viewed it as an abstraction that brings together theoretical insights grounded in the data.

Åkerstrøm Andersen (2003) highlighted the importance of navigating complex organizational landscapes through flexible strategies, offering a strong foundation for the principles underpinning the MNO concept. The core category of an MNO reflects a form of organizational resilience grounded in adaptability and structural fluidity. This characterizes the ability to reconfigure roles, relationships, and strategies in response to shifting external and internal conditions. Such adaptability is increasingly recognized as a critical capability in contemporary organizations that navigate uncertainty and complexity. Åkerstrøm Andersen (2003) emphasized how flexible strategies and evolving organizational forms are essential for operating in unstable environments, offering a conceptual foundation that aligns with the principles underlying MNO.

Additionally, Mintzberg's (1983) concept of *adhocracy* provides a complementary lens for organizational flexibility. Adhocracy refers to organizations that operate with minimal formalization, enabling rapid adaptation through specialized teams and decentralized decision-making (Mintzberg, 1983). This aligns with MNO's emphasis on dynamic adaptability and structural responsiveness, showing how organizations can balance innovation and control in uncertain environments. The MNO reflects how resilience is not only defined or discussed but also enacted through shifting strategies, structural adjustment, and interorganizational collaboration. It captures how organizations respond to external disruptions by reconfiguring their roles, functions, and governance arrangements across scales.

The theoretical idea of the MNO emerged from the vocabulary used by interviewees and was finally developed by analyzing the combined categories and axes based on them. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the core category should encapsulate the central phenomenon under study, in which case the socially constructed concept of resilience within an MNO bundles the three axes together while outlining the challenges faced in managing the network. The MNO reflects the operational dynamics of the Team Finland network, illustrating how resilience is negotiated, socially constructed, and enacted across geographic and administrative scales. Moreover, it describes how a network organization is compelled to transform itself, sometimes abruptly or without any control, in response to external and internal pressures. "Mutation" refers to the fact that the management of a network organization is unable to control all the practices of or changes within the individual organizations within the network. In our data, "resilience" was frequently invoked as a response to external pressures, often functioning as a linguistic placeholder that masks the complexity of these uncontrollable changes. This suggests that resilience not only describes adaptation or transformation but also operates rhetorically to frame unpredictable shifts as manageable or strategic. The use of policy jargon allows actors within the network to conceptualize uncontrollable processes as part of a broader narrative of organizational adaptability, even when mutative evolution directly challenges traditional management practices. Similarly, Doolan *et al.* (2024) emphasized how the resilience discourse can obscure structural challenges by reframing vulnerabilities as opportunities for strategic maneuvering.

The MNO integrates global and local dimensions, reflecting how the network navigates between a broader geographical scope and localized adaptations. This balance is crucial for fostering organizational and regional resilience, as the network leverages local knowledge and conditions to meet global challenges. By supporting region-specific responses, the MNO describes the resilience of local actors and ensures that the network can flexibly adapt to crises that affect different regions in distinct ways.

Selective coding allowed us to conceptualize resilience as a dynamic process involving learning, adaptation, mutation, and collaboration across multiple levels. This theoretical abstraction captures the ambiguous ties of resilience as a socially constructed phenomenon within a collaborative network, highlighting the need for generative governance to solve complex problems (Ansell and Torfing, 2021). Therefore, the MNO is associated with several themes of network management such as a protean mindset, knowledge sharing, delegation, and co-creation in governance practices.

The MNO also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the legal mandates, societal contexts, and cultural specificities that impact network actors operating in different regions. By acknowledging these regional specificities, the MNO describes resilience within organizations and contributes to a deeper understanding of how regional resilience is composed in networks, while regions respond to both local and global disruptions. Its strength lies in its ability to learn and adapt continuously, leveraging the diverse expertise and resources within the network to respond to crises. Thus, the selective coding phase unified the previously identified categories into a comprehensive framework that explains how resilience is understood and operationalized within Team Finland.

5. Discussion

In this study, resilience was studied as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by global crises, reflecting broader discussions in the resilience literature that emphasize the interplay between the infrastructural, economic, and social dimensions of resilience (Pendall *et al.*, 2010; Sutton *et al.*, 2023). Rather than treating organizational and regional resilience as separate phenomena, this study examined how they interact and coevolve within a network organization. The contents and contexts of resilience were also explored, as they were embedded in language-games based on the definitions used by the interviewees.

We employed a GT approach and explored how resilience is conceptualized and operationalized within the Team Finland network through 23 in-depth interviews. As a network organization providing internationalization services, Team Finland operates within the complex dynamics of globalization and deglobalization, integrating multiple actors who benefit from shared expertise, partnerships, and resources. The coalition of public authorities, nongovernmental organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions forms a governance structure that promotes the exchange of information and fosters anticipatory, learning-based actions. However, the collaborative nature of the network presents challenges, including disputes over authority and territorial control. These issues reflect governance and organizational resilience complexities, particularly when managing multiscale governance responses to crises, such as coordinating local and national objectives (Christopherson *et al.*, 2010).

The explanatory power of applying GT in this study was evident in the 3 axes derived from the 43 key concepts grounded in the original interview data. The three axes elucidated the tensions and challenges that network organizations seek to address. The scale axis illustrated the multifaceted nature of geographic activity, originating from specific locations while extending across multiple regions and utilizing resources at various levels, both nationally and internationally. The information axis highlighted the constraints posed by governance and legislation, which can hinder timely responses to changing circumstances, the usage of tacit knowledge, and transparency and complicate the development of innovative policies. This applies to the tasks of the network's member organizations and the network's client companies. Finally, the strategy axis revealed how organizations balance entrepreneurial innovation and agility with foresight and sustainability.

Our core category, MNO, developed through axial and selective coding, highlighted how administrative and regional scales are incorporated into decision-making processes such that unintended spontaneous organizational mutations and intentional adaptations are possible in a turbulent world of unexpected occurrences. The network's adaptive capacity is driven by its

collaborative structure and extensibility, which allow it to draw on diverse expertise, resources, and regional knowledge. While resilience often emphasizes reactive and proactive responses, the MNO illustrated a transformative approach, enabling the network to leverage crises as catalysts for organizational change, innovation, and sustainability. However, the MNO also captured unpredictable mutations that, while potentially harmful, may trigger beneficial organizational changes. Additionally, the network's activities explain the resilience of the regions in which it operates, as its collaborative governance structure allows responses that are sensitive to local needs and contexts (Bristow and Healy, 2014; Martin and Sunley, 2020).

The policy jargon offers terminology that encapsulates complex concepts such as “resilience,” “agility,” and “sustainability,” which were, according to our findings, hypernyms of expert language, with their more accurate meanings (hyponyms) often being interchangeable depending on the situation, medium, and presenter. Concerns exist about such terms becoming hollow buzzwords, stripped of substantive meaning (Pendall *et al.*, 2010). Public policy jargon is also used to mask paradoxes; for example, the term “resilience” may simply mask underlying structural challenges instead of addressing the foundational changes needed to adapt to crises effectively. However, the most frequently used concepts of policy jargon can be located in axial coding coordinates, which point to more operationalized content for organizational and regional resilience. Simultaneously, this makes it possible to identify parlance, indicating resilience in terms of its related contexts by using GT.

While this study critically engaged with the use of policy jargon, it also acknowledged that phrases such as “real-time information” and “ambidexterity” emerged organically in the interview data. Rather than imposing external vocabulary, the analysis built on the language and meanings articulated by the participants, consistent with GT's principle of inductively developing concepts from empirical data.

The concept of resilience has its critics. Some scholars argue that resilience, in its widespread use, risks becoming overly broad and vague, diminishing its analytical value (Davoudi, 2012; Pendall *et al.*, 2010). As Davoudi (2012) suggested, resilience's metaphorical stretch can lead to depoliticization, thereby obscuring underlying structural problems by focusing on “bouncing back” rather than addressing the root causes of vulnerabilities. Similarly, Joseph (2013) contended that resilience discourse can promote adaptability without necessarily questioning or changing problematic systemic structures. This critique raises a crucial question for MNO: Does it truly address the most important dimensions of resilience? By grounding resilience in collaborative governance and cross-scalar integration, interviews with the Team Finland experts from several organizations illustrated how the network organization can withstand mutations and transform itself. In addition, we witnessed how the network organization underwent managerial practices that would create beneficial tensions between different organizations within the entire network.

The nature of an MNO lies in its collaborative foundation, built on trust and long-standing partnerships between actors (Wong, 2015). These relationships facilitate resource allocation and improve coordination during crises. Addressing tensions is also crucial to develop a network's resilience and ensure that regional specificities are integrated into broader strategic planning. This aligns with previous research on the role of governance networks in fostering organizational and regional resilience (Boschma, 2015). By integrating global strategies with local needs, the network effectively balances top-down and bottom-up approaches, aligning with broader resilience research emphasizing multiscale collaboration (Martin and Sunley, 2020; Trippel *et al.*, 2023).

6. Conclusions

A significant contribution of this study is its exploration of how resilience is operationalized within the Team Finland network. It can be argued that some of the findings may also be applicable to other similar networks. The MNO illustrates how Team Finland's (re)actions and

transformations simultaneously affect the resilience of the network and the adaptive capacities of the multiple regions and actors in which it operates, both inside and outside Finland. This integrated approach highlights that crisis response (e.g., to Brexit, COVID-19, and the Ukraine war) requires organizational strategies tailored to regional contexts and the acceptance of the fact that a network organization will have to withdraw from areas or situations in which its activities are unsustainable or unsafe or where it is impossible to achieve its objectives. [Doolan et al. \(2024\)](#) suggested that resilience has a darker side. Organizational resilience can entail moral compromises, the masking of systemic weaknesses, resistance to necessary change, or an uncritical reproduction of existing structures under the guise of adaptability. In a network setting, this may manifest in tendencies such as groupthink, blurred responsibilities, or a superficial consensus that inhibits transformative action.

The network's resilience is not solely the result of reactions. Resilience co-evolves with an exogenous reason, causing mutations in the network. This leads to counteractions and proactive approaches that, in the best-case scenario, turn overwhelming challenges into major transformations in the network's structure and operation modes, resulting in substantial organizational learning and evolution. Additionally, a network's ability to exist in a capricious operational environment underscores the emergent idea of resilience.

Nonetheless, some structural challenges, such as those related to coordination, institutional constraints, and global–local alignment, remain. Efforts to articulate resilience concepts that align global strategies with localized adaptations are essential. However, the findings suggested that resilience in network organizations is not solely a matter of design or anticipation but involves the capacity to absorb unexpected disruptions through fluid coordination, shifting actor roles, and temporary fragmentation. In such networks, resilience does not rely on the stability of individual actors but on the network's ability to reorganize, allowing some organizations or regional actors to recede, while others assume prominence depending on the situation. This dynamic reflects the network's mutability and the emergent nature of resilience. Accordingly, policy frameworks should support generative governance that embraces uncertainty and enables constructive organizational mutations rather than relying solely on predefined roles or rigid planning.

Future research should continue to investigate how network organizations maintain resilience through fluid structures, shifting actor roles, and generative governance. Further exploration of the MNO concept in various national and sectoral contexts could clarify its broad applicability as a theoretical framework. Additionally, as the understanding of resilience as a polysemic social phenomenon evolves, future studies should consider how the term can be stretched or redefined in practice. Expanding the empirical scope to include more peripheral voices such as frontline staff or SMEs would offer deeper insights into how resilience is perceived and enacted across different layers of a mutable network.

This study had certain limitations. Although the data cover diverse organizational levels across the Team Finland network, they primarily reflect expert and managerial perspectives. Including a wider range of participants in future studies would enrich the understanding of how resilience is experienced and operationalized across different levels of the network, deepening the perspective introduced in this study.

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